

# Testimony before the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee

## Testimony of Eric Chester

March 17, 2016

Good afternoon Senator Duff, Representative Janowski, Senator Kane, Representative Buck-Taylor and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. My name is Eric Chester and it is an honor and privilege to be re-appointed to the State Department of Education Arbitration Board by Governor Dannel Malloy. I offer my sincere thanks to this Committee for the opportunity to appear before you and speak to my desire to continue to serve on the Education Arbitration Board.

I was raised in Meriden, Connecticut where I attended public school until my graduation from Platt High School in Meriden. I enlisted into the United States Army right out of high school and served four years in the Army where I was assigned to 3<sup>rd</sup> Ranger Battalion and participated in Operation Just Cause in 1989 and served during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. I served an additional 4 years in the Connecticut Army National Guard. My military experience provided me with a unique opportunity to serve my country and also see the world and I believe it prepared me for many of the challenges that I faced subsequent to being honorably discharged from the Army.

After my military service, I attended Southern Connecticut State University where I graduated with a Bachelor's in History and Secondary Education and maybe more importantly, met my wife. From there, I became a public school

teacher in New Haven where I taught History and Social Studies to high school students for eight or nine years.

While employed as a high school teacher, I attended the University of Connecticut School of Law. I went nights for four years and graduated from UCONN Law School in 2004. Also while a teacher, I became involved in the New Haven Federation of Teachers' Union where I served on the negotiating team for the Union during two separate contract negotiations. One went to binding arbitration and one was ultimately settled during negotiations. Upon completion from law school, I began working as an attorney for Ferguson & Doyle, which is presently Ferguson, Doyle & Chester. Our firm represents working people collectively and individually in a myriad of capacities and forums. We represent bargaining units and their members in contract negotiations, grievance arbitrations, in formal hearings before the State Board of Labor Relations and the Workers' Compensation Commission as well as in other forums.

I believe that my experience both as a product of public education, as well as representing public educators, from kindergarten teachers to college professors, has given me a unique opportunity to gain experience that will serve the interests of certified employees and the arbitration process well as a member of this Board. I believe I know what is good for students in the public education setting. My two children are students in North Haven public schools and I've had the pleasure to actually teach students for a number of years. I am quite confident that I can

represent the interests of certified educators in the public education setting within the State of Connecticut.

I represented the New Haven Federation of Teachers in their negotiations which resulted in the agreement reached between the Union and the New Haven Board of Education which has been viewed by many as a ground-breaking agreement that shepherded in a number of reforms around education. I was also fortunate enough to be asked to represent the Hartford Federation of Teachers in their binding interest arbitration regarding the very important issue of seniority and layoffs.

I am very interested in serving on this Board because I know the process can and does work. Binding arbitration gives both parties, management and labor, the leverage they need at the negotiating table to craft an agreement that they can both live with. The existing framework of binding interest arbitration instructs both labor and management that if they cannot come to an agreement, that there is a process whereby a panel of arbitrators, of which I would like to be a member of, will decide for them. Binding interest arbitration is a gamble for both sides. But it is not a process left to chance or luck. Rather, the statute lays out clear criteria by which the panel of arbitrators must rely on in coming to a reasoned decision. It quite simply, works. Given the increasing demands put on teachers today, coupled with the increased economic pressures placed on municipalities and their taxpayers, the binding interest arbitration process becomes more important. Labor

and management must be assured that their differences will be resolved in an effective and fair manner. The Teacher Negotiation Act provides this assurance.

I am quite confident that I am able to represent the interests of bargaining units representing certified employees. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and for the honor of being considered and hopefully re-appointed to this Board. I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have.